

PROPOSED USE OF THE PLENARY POWERS TO SECURE THAT THE NAME "COLUMBA MIGRATORIA" LINNAEUS, 1766, SHALL BE THE OLDEST AVAILABLE NAME FOR THE PASSENGER PIGEON, THE TYPE SPECIES OF THE GENUS "ECTOPISTES" SWAINSON, 1827

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The subject matter of the present application came to notice in the course of the routine checking of the entries on the *Official List of Generic Names in Zoology* in connection with the projected publication of the *Official List* in book form. It is concerned with the question of the name to be used for the Passenger Pigeon. This species, which is currently known by the name *Columba migratoria* Linnaeus, 1766 (*Syst. Nat.* (ed. 12) **1** (1) : 285) is the type species of the genus *Ectopistes* Swainson, 1827 (*Zool. J.* **3** (11) : 362), by subsequent selection by Swainson in 1837 (*in* Lardner's *Cabinet Cyclop.* **6** : 348—sometimes known by its sub-title *Nat. Hist. Classif. Birds* **2** : 348). The generic name *Ectopistes* Swainson, 1837, was placed on the *Official List* as Name No. 51 in the Commission's *Opinion* 67 (published in 1916, *Smithson Publ.* **2409** : 180).

2. When I checked this entry on the *Official List* against Peters' *Check-List of the Birds of the World*, I found the following footnote on page 83 of volume 3 published in 1937 :—

There can be no real doubt that Bangs (*Proc. Biol. Soc. Wash.*, **19**, 1906, 43–44) was entirely correct in disposing of the Linnean names, *Columba macroura*, *Columba migratoria* and *Columba marginata*, as he did. On the other hand, his proposed changes have never been accepted, and since there is also room for argument contrary to Bangs' reasoning, I feel that to depart from current usage would only cause needless confusion.

3. It was immediately apparent that, as the name *Ectopistes* Swainson, of which *Columba migratoria* is the type species had been placed on the *Official List*, this matter would need to be resubmitted to the Commission, for it would clearly be improper for the Commission to connive at the ignoring of the problem which had been raised by Bangs (1906, *Proc. biol. Soc. Wash.* **19** : 43–44). As a first step, I consulted Bangs' short paper to ascertain exactly what it was that he had said. His presentation of the issue is very succinct. It reads as follows :—

THE NAMES OF THE PASSENGER PIGEON AND MOURNING DOVE

To those naturalists who . . . use the twelfth edition of Linnaeus (1766) as the starting point of binomial nomenclature, the names of the Passenger Pigeon and the Mourning Dove are clear and offer no complications. Not so, however, to the Americans and others who start with the tenth edition (1758), for here Linnaeus unquestionably included both birds in the references under his *Columba macroura*.

The A.O.U. committee on nomenclature and American ornithologists generally have of late years used this name for the Mourning Dove, and have called the Passenger Pigeon by the name that first appeared in the twelfth edition—*Columba migratoria* Linn. In my opinion, however, this is hardly correct.

Linnaeus' *Columba macroura* was based on Edwards p. 15, t. 15, and Catesby p. 23, t. 23. Edwards' bird, carefully described and well figured, was, of course, a Mourning Dove, but it came from the West Indies, and Edwards tells us, "The Figure of this bird shows it of its natural Bigness." Measuring the various parts and comparing the results with specimens, I find it altogether too small for the continental form of the Mourning Dove, and to agree very well with the small form of Cuba (and other islands of the Greater Antilles ?), which has been lately named *Zenaidura macroura bella* by Palmer and Riley. The reference to Catesby applies wholly to the Passenger Pigeon and the plate shows a fine adult male.

Now as all Linnaeus' references were given chronologically it matters not which came first, and the important question is from which of these two distinct species, confused under one name, did Linnaeus take his brief diagnosis and his "Habitat". In this instance it is plain. Linnaeus' diagnosis reads "pectore purpurascens", and he also says "Habitat, in Canada: *hybernata* in Carolina", both directly from Catesby and neither having anything whatever to do with Edwards.

In the twelfth edition Linnaeus dropped *Columba macroura*, called the Passenger Pigeon *Columba migratoria*, the Carolina Mourning Dove *Columba carolinensis*, and named the bird of Edwards' plate No. 15 *Columba marginata*.

It is therefore my opinion that we who stand by the tenth edition must arrange the names of these Columbae as follows:—

Ectopistes macrourus (Linn.)

Passenger Pigeon

Columba macroura Linn., S.N. ed. 10, p. 164, 1758.

Zenaidura carolinensis carolinensis (Linn.)

Carolina Mourning Dove

Columba carolinensis Linn., S.N. ed. 12, p. 286, 1766.

Zenaidura carolinensis marginata (Linn.)*

West Indian Mourning Dove

Columba marginata Linn., S.N. ed. 12, p. 286, 1766.

4. My next step was to write as follows (on 14th October 1945) to my colleague, Dr. James L. Peters:—

Ectopistes Swainson, 1827: The type species of this genus is *Columba migratoria* Linnaeus, 1766, that species having been so selected by Swainson in 1837. Inspired by your footnote on page 83 of volume 3 of your *Check-List*, I have read Bangs' note in volume 19 of the *Proc. biol. Soc. Wash.* Naturally, I cannot express any opinion on the validity of his contentions but, as you state that: "There can be no real doubt" that he "was entirely correct in disposing of the Linnean names, *Columba macroura*, *Columba migratoria* and *Columba marginata*, as he did", I feel that the Commission can no longer leave things as they are, since to do so would be to cite in the *Official List* an incorrectly named species as the type species of the genus *Ectopistes* Swainson, 1827. It seems to me that the only way of avoiding the "needless confusion" referred to in your footnote, while at the same time avoiding an ostrich-like attitude of pretending not to see what

*As to this latter name's supplanting *Zenaidura carolinensis bella* (Palmer & Riley) I cannot help feeling regret that a good modern name founded on a bird from a definite region should give way to an old one without definite type locality. But I can see no help for it. Edwards distinctly says his bird was from the West Indies, and figures a very small example, and as the small size of the Cuban Mourning Dove is about its only distinctive character, I am afraid the *Columba marginata* Linn. must be the name by which it shall be known.

is the matter would be for the Commission to use its plenary powers (1) to declare that *Columba migratoria* Linnaeus, 1766, is the name to be used for the Passenger Pigeon, and (ii) to declare that the name *Columba macroura* Linnaeus, 1758, is the name to be used for the race of the Carolina Mourning Dove from the Greater Antilles. Such action would be in strict accord with Article 3 of the Plenary Powers Resolution (*Declaration 5*), which states that the prevention of the transference from one unit to another of generic and specific names is one of the particular objects of the Congress in granting the Commission these exceptional powers. I shall be grateful for your views on this question, since some action will certainly have to be taken in view of the fact that *Ectopistes* Swainson is on the *Official List*.

5. In his reply (dated 6th December 1945) Dr. Peters wrote as follows:—

Ectopistes Swainson, 1827 : As long as Bangs' suggestion has not been generally accepted, there is no confusion at present concerning the names of the Passenger Pigeon and the Mourning Dove. The suggestion was made 39 years ago and in the passage of time Bangs' proposal has more or less receded into the background and the commonly accepted identity of the two Linnean species involved has become more firmly fixed. There is, however, always the danger that the case will be resurrected and I feel, as you do, that the Commission would do well definitely to use its Plenary Powers and settle the matter for all time.

6. Ever since the correspondence quoted above, I have intended to take the first convenient opportunity for laying the present case before the Commission. Such an opportunity has now arisen through the presentation to the Commission by the Standing Committee on Ornithological Nomenclature of a large number of applications relating to the names of birds. Before doing so, I have laid the draft of the present paper before Colonel Richard Meinertzhagen, the Chairman of the Standing Committee. Colonel Meinertzhagen has informed me (*in litt.*, 29th August 1952) that he considers that it is important that the Commission should now settle without further delay this long-outstanding question and that he is in agreement with the solution recommended in the present application.

7. Before I set out the action recommended, it will, I think, be repaying briefly to examine what Linnaeus wrote about his nominal species *Columba macroura* when in 1758 (: 164) he first published that name. It is extremely brief and reads as follows:—

Columba

macoura 16. C. cauda cuneiformi longa, pectore purpurascente
Columba macroura. *Edw. av.* 15 t. 15.
Palumbus migratorius. *Catesb. car.* 1 p. 23 t. 23.
Habitat in Canada; hybernat in Carolina.

8. As in many Linnean descriptions there is nothing in the description given by Linnaeus for *Columba macroura* to show, or even to suggest, that he had ever had before him a specimen of the species to which he applied this name or was doing more than giving a name to the birds figured by Edwards and Catesby respectively, which he erroneously supposed were conspecific with one another. Thus, it is quite possible that there never was a type specimen of this nominal species. Whether there was or not, no such specimen is now extant and the only means of identifying the taxonomic species represented by this nominal species is through the two figures which Linnaeus cited. Of these figures, it is agreed by ornithologists that the figure given by Edwards represents the

Mourning Dove and that by Catesby the Passenger Pigeon. Thus, the nominal species *Columba macroura* Linnaeus may be looked upon as having been initially a composite species. According to this view, the trivial name *macroura* Linnaeus would adhere to whichever of the two included species was first definitely so selected under the provisions of Article 31. Until 1948 this Article was so lacking in precision that it is often a matter of opinion whether action by a particular author on a particular date can properly be regarded as a selection made under this Article. In the present instance Bangs quite definitely made such a selection by specifying Catesby's plate 23 as the figure by which the nominal species *Columba macroura* should be identified, thus making Catesby's plate the representative of a lectotype for this species (see 1950, *Bull. zool. Nomencl.* 4 : 74-76). This is not to say, however, that no ornithologist at an earlier date had not made a valid selection of Edwards' plate 15 to represent the lectotype, though the fact that no evidence of any such prior selection has, so far as I am aware, been brought forward for the purpose of rebutting Bangs' contention suggests at least that it is unlikely that any such selection is known to have been made. The present case is complicated, however, by the existence of another consideration which does not seem to have been advanced in express terms. This consideration arises from the fact that both the authors (Edwards and Catesby) cited by Linnaeus, though pre-1758 authors, nevertheless by accident applied binominal names to the birds which they figured and that the name used by Edwards was *Columba macroura* and was thus an absolute tautonym of the name selected by Linnaeus for his nominal species. It might therefore be argued that on this account Linnaeus should be treated as having himself "indicated" by absolute tautonymy that he regarded Edwards' bird as being (or his figure as representing) the type specimen of this nominal species, to the exclusion of Catesby's bird, notwithstanding the fact that he took part of his description and the whole of his "Habitat" from Catesby and not from Edwards.

9. It therefore seems legitimate to conclude that in this case (as in the case of the names of many other composite nominal species established long before the introduction of the *Règles*) it is a matter of real difficulty to determine under Article 31 to which of the included taxonomic species the trivial name *macroura* Linnaeus is properly applicable under the *Règles*. Nothing therefore but a ruling by the Commission could provide a definite settlement of the present case. In a case such as the present where on balance it seems likely that the result desired is the reverse of that which would result from a strict application of the ordinary provisions of the *Règles*, the only certain method of securing that solution is by the use by the Commission of its plenary powers. This is the procedure recommended by the late Dr. Peters and is also recommended by Colonel Meineitzhagen. This therefore is the recommendation which I now put forward for consideration.

10. The specific proposals now submitted are that the International Commission on Zoological Nomenclature should :—

- (1) use its plenary powers to designate the description given on page 15, and the figure given on plate 15 by Edwards (G.), *Nat. Hist. Birds*, for the species which that author called *Columba macroura* to represent the lectotype of the nominal species *Columba macroura*

Linnaeus, 1758, the type locality thus to become that cited by Edwards, namely the "West Indies";

- (2) place the under-mentioned trivial names on the *Official List of Specific Trivial Names in Zoology* :—

(a) *macroura* Linnaeus, 1758 (as published in the combination *Columba macroura*), as proposed, under (1) above, to be defined under the plenary powers;

(b) *migratoria* Linnaeus, 1766 (as published in the combination *Columba migratoria*) (trivial name of type species of *Ectopistes* Swainson, 1827);

(c) *carolinensis* Linnaeus, 1766 (as published in the combination *Columba carolinensis*):

- (3) place on the *Official Index of Rejected and Invalid Specific Trivial Names in Zoology* the trivial name *marginata* Linnaeus, 1766 (as published in the combination *Columba marginata*) (a name which, being based upon Edwards' plate 15, is an objective junior synonym of the trivial name *macroura* Linnaeus, 1758 (as published in the combination *Columba macroura*), as proposed, under (1) above, to be defined under the plenary powers).